



U.S. Department of Justice

Brett L. Tolman

**United States Attorney
District of Utah**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 29, 2008

CONTACT: MELODIE RYDALCH
801-325-3206
801-243-6475 (CELL)

PRESS RELEASE
EUSEBIO AGUILERA-MEZA
GETS 276 MONTHS IN PRISON
IN FEDERAL MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

SALT LAKE CITY – Eusebio Aguilera-Meza, age 43, of West Jordan, convicted of federal money laundering charges in December following a two-week trial, will serve 276 months in federal prison. Judge Dale A. Kimball issued the sentence Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Salt Lake City.

Federal prosecutors say Aguilera-Meza, using three business locations, laundered significant amounts of drug proceeds for many different drug dealers between 1998 and 2005. He admitted that he transmitted money for persons he knew to be drug dealers and that he concealed and disguised the transmission of the money by falsifying and altering documents, by failing to create and maintain transaction records, by sending and receiving the money through fictitious nominees, by structuring transactions, and by failing to file currency transaction reports.

By his own admission, as an unlicensed money remitter he transmitted between \$38,650,000 and \$43,450,000 to Mexico. Of that amount, the defendant confessed that between \$4,047,000 and \$5,845,000 constituted proceeds from drug trafficking. Federal prosecutors believe that

while he ran a money servicing business assisting drug dealers, he did not distribute drugs.

"Money laundering is a global threat, fuel for criminals to conduct their criminal affairs and is used to manipulate and erode our nation's financial systems," IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Wes Eddy said. "As demonstrated in this case, IRS-CI and our law enforcement partners are united in our determination to financially disrupt criminal organizations and their enablers who help them move and hide their illegally derived money."

Aguilera-Meza's sentence included a two-level enhancement for obstruction of justice for what the court determined was perjury committed while testifying in his own defense during the trial. In a sentencing memorandum filed with the court, prosecutors said that "while inaccurate testimony may result from something other than a willful attempt to obstruct justice, such as confusion, mistake or faulty memory," the circumstances of this case indicate the "defendant had great motivation to misrepresent the truth, and he did so." Aguilera-Meza's sentence also was increased because the court found him to be an organizer or leader of the criminal activity. The court determined that he was a leader of five or more participants, the criminal activity was extensive, and he exercised management responsibility over the property, assets and activities of the organization.

The charges against Aguilera-Meza resulted from a two-year investigation conducted by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force in Utah and involved agents and officers from the Salt Lake City Police Department, IRS Criminal Investigation, the DEA, ICE, the ATF, and other local law enforcement agencies.

"Money laundering is a serious offense and deserves severe penalties," U.S. Attorney Brett L. Tolman said today. "The movement of money is increasingly an integral part of criminal conduct. In fact, many believe money laundering is one of the most serious threats to our national and economic security. Those like Mr. Aguilera-Meza, who move money through our financial systems for drug dealers or others involved in criminal conduct, can expect to be aggressively prosecuted," Tolman said.

Aguilera-Meza was indicted in December 2005 with eight other individuals. A jury convicted him of two counts of conspiracy to commit

money laundering – one involving actual proceeds of drug activity and one involving an undercover law enforcement operation with money represented to be from drug sales; conducting an unlicensed money transmitting business; two counts of failure to file a currency transaction report; and re-entering the country following a previous deportation. Aguilera-Meza is a Mexican national.

"This lengthy sentence sends the message that those who launder proceeds for drug trafficking organizations are just as culpable as those who deal the drugs themselves," Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey D. Sweetin of the DEA's Rocky Mountain Field Division said today.

Five other individuals in the case have reached plea agreements with federal prosecutors and received sentences ranging from 6 to 48 months in federal prison. These defendants accepted responsibility for their conduct and several cooperated with federal prosecutors, receiving credit in their sentencing calculations. Warrants are pending for three other defendants in the case, Jose Luis Aguilera-Meza, age 47, of West Valley City, Adalberto Aguilera-Meza, age 54, of West Jordan and Veronica Moran, age 35, also of West Jordan, who have never been arrested on the charges in the indictment. Prosecutors believe the three individuals, who are Mexican nationals, are in Mexico.

####